

TRIUMPH OF THE ECONOMIC VIRTUES
251

analysis of natural conditions, the calculations of forces and strains, the reduction of the complex to the operation of simple, constant, and measurable forces, was the natural bias of an age interested primarily in mathematics and physics. Its object was "to express itself in terms of number, weight or measure, to use only arguments of sense, and to consider only such causes as have visible foundations in nature; leaving those that depend upon the mutable minds, opinions, appetites and passions of particular men to the consideration of others."¹ M

In such an atmosphere, the moral casuistry, which had occupied so large a place in the earlier treatment of social and economic subjects, seemed the voice of an antiquated superstition. Moreover, the main economic dogma of the mercantilist had an affinity with the maia ethical dogma of the Puritan, which was the more striking because the coincidence was undesigned. To the former, production, not consumption, was the pivot of the economic system, and, by what seems to the modern reader a curious perversion, consumption is applauded only because it offers a new market for productive energies. To the latter, the cardinal virtues are precisely those which find in the strenuous toils of industry and commerce their most natural expression*

The typical qualities of the successful business life, in the days before the rise of joint-stock enterprise, were intensity and earnestness of labour, concentration, system and method, the initiative which broke with routine and the foresight which postponed the present to the future. Advice like that of the Reverend Mr* Steele to his City congregation was admirably calculated to give these arduous excellences a heightened status and justification. The lean goddess, Abstinence,* whom Mr. Keynes, in a passage of brilliant indiscretion, has revealed as the tutelary divinity of Victorian Eng-land, was inducted to the austere splendours of her ascetic shrine by the pious hands of Puritan moralists*